



EDUCATION IN THE HIGHLANDS
IN THE
OLDEN TIMES

BY
WILLIAM MACKAY, LL.D.
CHAIRMAN OF THE INVERNESS-SHIRE
EDUCATION AUTHORITY

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PRINTED AT THE "NORTHERN CHRONICLE" OFFICE

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PREFATORY NOTE

This reprint of a paper issued some years ago is published on the suggestion of persons interested in Education in the Highlands. The paper has been considerably extended.

W. M.

Craigmonie, Inverness,

September 1921



**LAURISTON CASTLE
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WORK OF THE EARLY MISSIONARIES.

The Highlands of Scotland owe the introduction of letters to the early Christian missionaries. "One of the most striking features of the organisation of the early monastic Church in Ireland and Scotland," says the late Dr Skene, "was its provision for the cultivation of learning, and for the training of its members in sacred and profane literature; so that it soon acquired a high reputation for the cultivation of letters, and drew to it students from all quarters, as the best school for the prosecution of all, and especially theological, studies." When St Columba landed in Scotland in the year 563, he brought with him that love of learning which he had imbibed at the Irish school of Clonard; and we are told by his biographer, Adamnan, that, at his establishment, in Iona, he "never could spend even one hour without study, or prayer,

or writing, or some other holy occupation." He was the author of hymns and other productions in Latin and Gaelic; and such was the reputation which he and his followers acquired for learning, that people from all parts of Britain were drawn to Iona for study, among them being Aldfrid, who, in 685 became King of Northumbria. Among other Celtic ecclesiastical establishments which in those early times kept the lamp of learning burning may be mentioned those of Rosemarkie, supposed to have been founded in the sixth century; Applecross, founded by St Maolrubha in 673; and Dunkeld, Kilmun, Deer, and Turriff. In those houses learned functionaries, known in Gaelic as "scribhnidh"—from the Latin "scriba"—studied and wrote, and lectured and taught, as early as the seventh century. In the eighth and ninth they were superseded by the "firleiginn" (lecturers), who continued to be the principal teachers down to the thirteenth century. In addition to those learned men, there was a lower class of students called "scolocs"—we have still the word in the Gaelic "sgalag," a farm servant—poor searchers after knowledge, who received education in the monasteries in return for their services as labourers on the church lands, and who appear in the monastic records as late as the fourteenth century.

THE EARLY CELTIC CHURCH.

The literature studied in the early Celtic Church consisted chiefly of the Bible, the works of the early Christian fathers, lives of Irish

and Scottish saints, sermons and confessions, and Latin and Gaelic hymns; and the recording of the traditions of the Church and the saints, and of the notable events of the period, frequently afforded congenial employment to the industrious clerics. Numerous Latin and Gaelic manuscripts of those distant times have come down to us—most of them supposed to have been written in Ireland; but one of them at least—the Book of Deer, which contains the gospel of St John and portions of the other three Gospels, the Apostles' Creed, and a fragment of an office for the Visitation of the Sick, all in Latin, and the Legend of the Foundation of the Church of Deer, and memoranda of grants of land to the Church and privileges bestowed on it, in Gaelic—is undoubtedly of Scottish origin.

It is impossible now to determine to what extent the common people participated in the knowledge imparted in those Celtic monasteries. The probability is that the teaching was very much confined to the inmates, and to a few of the better classes; but the existence of the "scolocs" shows that the poorer people were not wholly excluded.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the Celtic Church, which had suffered greatly during the Norse invasions, gradually merged into the Church of Rome, and, under the fostering care of the kings and landowners, great and well-endowed monasteries took the place of the smaller religious houses which formerly existed. In those new institutions the study of the literature of the age was

steadily pursued; and the education supplied in many of the Abbeys and Priories of Scotland, from the thirteenth century to the Reformation, was almost as high as was to be obtained in the ordinary universities of Europe. And it is also certain that the religious establishments of that period provided the poor with the means of education to a very considerable extent.

MONASTIC AND GRAMMAR SCHOOLS.

Among the institutions to which Highland boys of position and promise resorted before the Reformation for educational purposes, were the religious houses of Beaulieu, Rosemarkie, Fearn, Kinloss, Kingussie, and Ardoch; but of the state of education during that period the glimpses we get are few and far between. Not to leave our own district, however, we find that in 1505 George Dawson taught within the Priory of Beaulieu, where there was a large library of books and manuscripts, and made himself most obliging in educating the children of the surrounding gentlemen. Thirty years later, Robert Reid, prior of Beaulieu and abbot of Kinloss, greatly encouraged learning. Under his superintendence, John Person, a Cistercian monk, instructed the youths of Beaulieu; and in 1541 such of these as were intended for the Church were removed to Kinloss, where they sat for three years at the feet of Ferrarius, a Piedmontese scholar, whom Prior Reid had induced to settle there. Ferrarius himself informs us that his course of lectures embraced such subjects as the works of

Aristotle, Cicero, Virgil, Erasmus, and Melancthon. The good Robert Reid subsequently became Bishop of Orkney, and Lord President of the Court of Session. At his death he left a sum of money for the maintenance at the Universities of gentlemen's sons "that had good spirits" but had not the whereupon to prosecute their studies; and another fund for the education of young gentlewomen left unprovided for by their parents. His copy of the *Regiam Majestatem*—a bulky manuscript bound in ancient parchment and bearing his name—now belongs to the writer of this paper.

In addition to these monastic schools, there were from an early period grammar schools in Elgin, Inverness, Fortrose, and other northern burghs; and the sons of the larger landowners frequently received their education on the Continent. The Master of Lovat, for example, who fell at the clan battle of Blar-na-leine in 1544, was an accomplished scholar, who first studied at Beaulieu, and thereafter in France; and many Highland chiefs attended to the education of their sons, even before the Act of 1494 made it incumbent on all barons and freeholders to send their sons to grammar schools at eight or nine years of age, and to keep them there until they were "competentlie founded" and had "perfite Latine."

In connection with the attendance of these Highland students it is interesting to note that by the "statutes" made in 1553 for the introductory classes taught by the Humanists of King's College, Aberdeen, all the students must speak in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, or

Gaelic, never in the vernacular (Scots or English) at least with those who know Latin—"Loquantur omnes Latine, Graece, Hebraice, Gallice, Hybernice, nunquam vernacule, saltem cum his qui Latine noscunt." (Misc., Spalding Club, V., 400).

THE ERECTION OF PARISH SCHOOLS.

During the storm of the Reformation little practical interest was taken by Roman Catholic or Protestant in the education of the young; but as soon as the tempest had abated, John Knox and his followers took the matter in hand, and to them is due the credit of having first given shape to, if not of having originated, the idea of a national system in which rich and poor could alike participate. They strongly advocated that there should be a school and a competent teacher in each parish, and repeatedly endeavoured to procure a sufficient endowment for this laudable object out of the forfeited patrimony of the ancient Church. On the question of endowment they were, unfortunately, not successful. The great bulk of the church property went to the nobles; and when the Crown did happen to turn church revenues into educational channels it was not for the advancement of elementary education in the parishes from which the revenues flowed, but to support students at the grammar schools and universities. Hence, we find that in 1573, James the Sixth, who subsequently judged himself no mean scholar, and affected the patronage of literature, granted the revenues of St Monan's

Chaplainry, in the parish of Kiltearn, Ross-shire, to Alexander Munro, for seven years, for his sustentation at the schools. Two years later, the King gave the revenues of the chaplainries of St Lawrence in Dingwall, and Artafally in the Black Isle, to James Davidson, son of John Davidson, tailor in Edinburgh, to keep him at school; and in 1586, Thomas Davidson, another son of the same fortunate tailor, got the same revenues for seven years to support him "in the College of Cambridge in England. . . . for his better education in verteu and guid letters."

Although, as we have seen, Knox was not successful in his efforts for the endowment of schools, one result of his agitation was that Parliament and the Privy Council were stirred to take some interest in the cause which he had so much at heart. In 1616 the Council issued an Act for the erection of schools in every parish, "that all his Majesty's subjects, especially the youth, be exercised and trayned up in civilitie, godliness, knowledge, and learning; that the vulgar Ingleeshe tongue be universallie planted, and the Irish language [that is, the Gaelic], which is one of the chieff and principall causes of the continuance of barbaritie and incivilitie among the inhabitants of the Isles and Hylandis, may be abolishit and removit."

AN ABORTIVE ACT.

If John Knox, at whose instance the first printed Gaelic book was published, had been living in 1616, this Act would in

all probability have been more judiciously worded; and whatever effect it had in the South of Scotland, very little followed it in the North. The Highlanders were too much attached to their ancient language to give encouragement to a scheme the avowed object of which was to abolish it, and, moreover, they themselves were not too flatteringly referred to in the Act; and although its provisions were, in 1631, confirmed by Parliament, they continued to be ignored within the Highland line. In 1646, however, Parliament enacted, in more politic and less offensive terms, that there should be a school in every parish under the superintendence of the presbytery of the bounds, and the duties thus imposed on them were taken up by the presbyteries of the North with great energy and intelligence. But they had enormous difficulties to contend with. In making provision for only one school in each parish the Legislature forgot that Highland parishes are as large as Lowland counties or German kingdoms. The Highlands, too, were poor; the landowners, upon whom was placed the burden of providing the schools and the salaries of the teachers, had small rentals; and the country was in a seething state of unrest and civil war. In some parishes, therefore, the statute was for years a dead letter; but in others its provisions were carefully carried into effect. The old records of the Highland Presbyteries throw considerable light on the efforts made in the good cause, and the extent to which those efforts were successful. In 1647, the year after

the passing of the Act, a Commission of Assembly sitting at Auldearn ordained that the Presbyteries should use diligence in the plantation of schools, and a commission which visited Ross-shire about the same time, while ordering "all ministers within the province to preach powerfully against witchcraft and develish practices of that sort," also issued the more enlightened decree "that schools be erected in every paroch, and diligence thereanent be reported to the next Provincial [Synod] of Ross betwixt this and the next visitation at Chanonrie;" and there was a special injunction "that the Presbyterie of Chanonrie have care of planting a schoole at Kilmuir Wester."

The Presbytery of Dingwall, whose preserved records go back to 1649, loyally endeavoured to give effect to these instructions. At a presbyterial visitation of the church of Kiltearn on 3rd July, 1649, the ministers and elders of that parish "being enquired what progress they made for plantation of a schoole?" answered that "they were to contribut for ane schoole with Alnies" (Alness), and we learn from a minute of 14th August, 1650, that there was at that date a school at Alness, of which Mr Donald Munro was appointed master. On 17th July, 1649, Mr Donald Fraser, minister of Kilmorack, declared to the Presbytery "that he presses a school;" and he was "ordained to urge the same moir and moir and report his diligence to the Presbyterie." The result of this pressure is given in the following minute of 19th February, 1650:—"Compeared Hew

Ross from the paroch of Kilmorack, and the Presbyterie being certified of his good education and conversation, and finding upon tryall his abilitie for instructing of children and fitting them for grammar schooles, doe therefore admitt him to the said charge, recommending him to Mr Donald Fraser [Minister of Kilmorack] to be received and encouraged to that effect."

OTHER RECORDS.

On 31st July, 1649, the ministers and elders of Urquhart of Ferintosh reported "that they were going about to seek for a man to be schoolmaster and clerk to the sessione;" and it is satisfactory to find that they were soon successful in their search, for, on 23rd October following, William Reid was appointed schoolmaster of the parish of the future Apostle of the North. On 11th September, 1649, the Presbytery of Dingwall, "considering the expedience of plantation of schooles, and the Act of Parliament made thereanent, thought fitt that the under-written persones sauld be required by the ministers of the severall paroches quhere they reside to meete with the Presbyterie the nixt [meeting] day for tacking course for the erection and plantation of schooles within the Presbyterie, conform to the tenor of the Act of Parliament; for which effect the persones following were nominat and ordained to be required, viz., Robt. Munro of Obstill, Hew Fraser of Eskadail, Hector Douglas of Balkney, Andrew Monro, portioner of Culcairne, Donald Finlaysone, portioner thereof, Hew

Monro of Teaninich, Hew Monro of Foiris, Androw Monro of Teanuar [Novar], Hew Monro in Kinkell, Mr Jon. Monro of Swardill, Farqr. Monro of Teanaird, and Neil Beaton of Culcraggie."

The majority of the members of this ancient school board met on the 18th of the same month and discussed how best to make provision for the support of a school in each parish. They thought that an assessment of "twell pounds [Scots] out of the thousand merks rent might suffice, but continewed the absolute determination of anything untill they met with the rest of the members." On 9th October the Presbytery, "considering that the Commissioners for plantation of schooles have not set downe as yet any solid course for plantation of schooles," ordained them to be present at the next meeting of Presbytery. At that meeting, however, none of them appeared, and "the matter was continewed untill they might meet with more convenience."

But the times were inopportune; that year had seen Charles the First die on the scaffold; civil war was ravaging the land; the appearance of Montrose in the North made it more and more inconvenient for the Commissioners to meet; and the minute which I have just quoted contains the last mention of them in the presbyterial records. The clergy, however, struggled on in the educational cause. Curiously enough, their greatest difficulty seems to have been in connection with the ancient burgh of Dingwall. In that town there was a school long before the period I am now speaking of,

and in 1569 Donald Adamson was master thereof; but in time it ceased to exist, and on 22nd January, 1650, Mr John Macrae, the minister of the parish, had to report to the Presbytery that he “regrates that he cannot prevaile in the mater of planting of a schoole in Dingwall.” The Magistrates and Heritors are ordered to be summoned to appear before the Presbytery at next meeting; but, in response to this summons, only two of the Heritors—the lairds of Tulloch and Knockbayne—appear, and they declare that no school can be maintained in Dingwall “unless the paroch of Foddertie joyne with them.” They were enjoined to come to an arrangement with Fodderty; but for years no result followed. By 1664, however, an end was put to this state of matters. In that year Mr* John Macrae is schoolmaster of the capital of Ross.

WORK IN INVERNESS-SHIRE.

Unfortunately, the earlier records of the Presbytery of Inverness have not been preserved, and a volume commencing in April, 1670, is the first now extant. We have therefore no record of the first efforts of that Presbytery in the cause of education in the rural parishes.† It is evident, however, that the members did not entirely neglect their duty in this matter.

* “Mr” indicates that he was an M.A.

† One volume of the missing Records has, since this paper was written, been found in England, but it ends in 1644, two years before the Education Act of 1646 was passed, and it throws no light on our subject.

In 1671 there was a school in Kiltarlity, in which Mr George Hutcheson taught so acceptably that his minister and elders "were well satisfied with him in everie thing;" and in 1677 Mr John Munro, the then schoolmaster of that parish, is described as "of a Christian, civile, blameless conversatione," and gets "a large applaus for his painefullness and diligent attendance on schoole and sessione." The youth of Kirkhill were taught in 1672 by Mr Charles Ritchie, and he was succeeded by Mr Thomas Fraser, who, in the words of his minister, the Rev. James Fraser, the accomplished author of the Wardlaw Manuscript, "besides his attendance of the schoole, was precentor and clerk, and read the Scriptures publickly every Lord's day in the Irish [Gaelic] betwixt the second and third bell." For these multifarious duties Mr Fraser received annually "a chalder of victuall with £20 [Scots—equal to £1 13s 4d sterling] out of the box, and also the baptisme and marriage money." He afterwards became minister of Dores; and we find him, in March, 1687, preaching before the Presbytery with much acceptance, on the theme, "De peccato veniali et mortali"—concerning venial and mortal sins. How he treated his delicate text we are, unfortunately, not informed. In 1682 there was a "flourishing schoole" at Petty, and a "fixt schoolmaster, who was a great help to the minister." The poor minister evidently needed help, for, in connection with the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, it is recorded of him that "he had a table only—other things being borrowed."

UPHILL WORK.

In going over the dry and faded records of the early times with which I am now dealing, it is pleasant to get such glimpses as I have given of the intellectual lights that then burned, however dimly, in some of our rural parishes; and it is almost a pity to mar that pleasure by referring to other parishes in which darkness still prevailed. The planting of schools in the latter was very uphill work. In the parish of Moy, for example, there was no school in 1672, the reason given by the heritors and elders being that "the townes within the parochin were far distant one from the other." The people of Daviot were a step in advance, for, in the same year, they had "ane schoole;" but, alas! "the schoolmaster was forced to leave them for want of sustenance." They undertook to get the teacher back, and make suitable provision for him; but the undertaking was not implemented, and by-and-bye even the school disappeared. In 1682 the minister reported "that they could not nor had any schoolmaster because there was no encouragement for ane, nor no mediat centricall place quhere they could fix a schoole to the satisfactione of all concerned." There was no school in Boleskine in 1672, "in regard the townes in the parish were remote the one from the other, and they had no convenience of boarding children." Dores was without a public school in 1675, "but several gentlemen had schooles in their own houses for educating and training up of their children, and they [the heritors] were upon a feaseable way, if this deare

yeare were by, to convene and stent themselves for ane publick school for the common good of the whole parish." The brethren of the Presbytery were pleased with this feasible way, and they exhorted the minister and heritors "to follow and cherish this good motion, as they wish that the knowledge of God may be upon the groweing hand among them, and their posteritie to bless their actions when they are gone." There was, in 1677, no school in Glen-Urquhart "for the present;" but the minister and elders stated that, "when the Laird of Grant cam to the cuntrey, they were to require his helpe and assistance how to get some victuall to maintain a schoolmaster; and they were exhorted to do the same, which would be good service done to God." And, as a further example, Croy was without a schoolmaster as late as 1685, for the reason that there was "no fixed salary for one."

TROUBLOUS TIMES.

The wars and strifes which agitated the Highlands for years before and after the Revolution of 1688 were not calculated to promote education, and many of the schools established in the early part of the century ceased to exist. In 1690 William the Third made an effort to improve matters in Argyllshire by enacting that for the future all vacant stipends within that county should be applied to educational purposes, and in 1696 he granted to the Synod of Argyll the rents of the Bishopric of Argyll for such purposes, and the grant was thereafter from time

to time renewed. In 1696 the King erected a school at Fort-William, then known as Maryburgh (after Mary his Queen), the teacher of which was to have the then large salary of £20 stg. a year, and in that year was passed the Act of Parliament which finally established the good old Parochial System which continued until 1872. Under that Act the heritors of each parish were bound to erect a school and to maintain a teacher; but, alas! King William, whose popularity was never great in the Highlands, lost all favour after the massacre of Glencoe, and any scheme emanating from him or his Government was received with suspicion and distrust. In the majority of the Highland parishes the statute remained for years a dead letter. Even the school established by the King at Fort-William came to an untimely end, and altogether the close of the seventeenth century was, educationally, as dark and dreary as it well could be. The chiefs and lairds and better class of tacksmen sent their sons, it is true, to the grammar schools of Inverness, Fortrose, and other burghs, and the children of some of the more pronounced Jacobites received their education in France; but the poorer classes were neglected. In these circumstances a few private gentlemen in Edinburgh met in 1701, and resolved to establish schools in the Highlands and Islands, and to appeal to the public for subscriptions for the purpose. Their first school was in a short time opened at Abertarff (now Fort-Augustus); but the schoolmaster met with such discouragement from the inhabitants that after a trial of eighteen months it had to be closed.

The Edinburgh gentlemen were, however, not to be discouraged. In 1703 they published a statement setting forth the condition of the Highland people, and making suggestions for its amelioration by Parliament. Parliament did nothing; but the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland took up the scheme, with the result that in 1707 they appointed a select committee, which, after conferring with the Edinburgh gentlemen, published proposals for propagating Christian knowledge in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, and in foreign parts of the world. Copies of these proposals, with subscription papers annexed, were sent to persons of influence throughout the kingdom. Queen Anne encouraged the scheme by royal proclamation; subscriptions flowed in; and in 1709 the Queen granted letters patent under the great seal for erecting certain of the subscribers into a corporation.

THE S.P.C.K.

Thus was established, with a capital fund, to begin with, of upwards of £1000 sterling, "the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge"—the first meeting of which was held on 3rd November, 1709. At their second meeting (5th January, 1710) it was decided to establish schools in such parts of the Highlands as would from time to time need them most—in which schools Protestants and Roman Catholics would be taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, with such other subjects as should be considered suitable to the pupils' circumstances. The progress of the Society was mar-

vellous. In 1711 it supported twelve schools, one of which was at Abertarff, from where, as will be remembered, a teacher had already been driven; and another in distant St Kilda. In 1715 the Society had twenty-five schools open; 34 in 1718; 48 in 1719; 78 having 2757 scholars in 1728; 111 schools in 1733; 128 in 1742; 159 in 1772; and 323 in 1795. In addition to paying the teachers' salaries, the Society supplied the children with school books, established public libraries in various parishes, and defrayed the expense of printing Gaelic Bibles and other books—among them being the Gaelic and English Vocabulary, published in 1741 by Alexander Macdonald, the famous Gaelic Bard, and one of the Society's schoolmasters. I cannot say to what extent the libraries were patronised by the people, but, judging from the incident I am about to relate, it was sometimes difficult for them to get at the books. I find from the records of the Presbytery of Mull that at a meeting of that Presbytery held at Aros in March, 1730, Mr Morrison, minister of Coll, reported "that Mr M'Aula, his predecessor in office, carried off the library to the Harris, because he was not paid for his expenses in bringing them to Coll." The Rev. Aulay Macaulay, here referred to, was translated to Harris in 1712, so that, at the time of this report, the books had been in his possession there for 18 years; and it is not likely that they ever saw Coll again. Thus it was that Mr Macaulay contrived to have a library; and thus early do we find in the Macaulay family that love of books which reached its full development in the

person of Lord Macaulay, the great-grandson of the thieving minister of Harris.

THE WORK OF CHURCH AND OTHER AGENCIES.

Great though the services of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge were, the need for other agencies arose as the desire for education increased. The Gaelic School Society, founded in 1811, existed till 1892, and during that period supported a large number of schools. In 1824 the General Assembly originated the Educational Scheme of the Church of Scotland, in connection with which Principal Baird, "the father and founder of the scheme," and the first Dr Norman Macleod—"Caraid nan Gaidheal," the Friend of the Gael—did great and noble work. These two, along with Mr Gordon, the first secretary of the Scheme, travelled over every Island and Highland parish, and reported that 90,000 persons between the ages of six and twenty, could read neither English nor Gaelic. To their appeal for funds there was a generous response, and in a great speech which Dr Macleod made in Exeter Hall, London, in May, 1844, he was able to state:—

"The object of the scheme is not merely to supply the plainest elementary education where it is already wanted, but to raise the quality of education, and aim at its improvement throughout the whole land. For this purpose the Committee have a Normal School in Edinburgh, in which 85 persons, educating for the office of schoolmaster, have attended in the course of last year, obtaining a practical know-



ledge of the art of teaching. A new building is in the course of being erected there at the estimated cost of £8000; the Government generously agreed to pay one-half, and also to give an annual grant of £500, on condition that the Committee of Assembly engaged to find a similar sum, and an arrangement is also in the way of being made in regard to the very splendid Normal Institution in Glasgow; so that the Committee of the Scheme which I am now bringing under your notice are answerable for the sum of £1000 a year for those training schools, and for the expenses of maintaining 146 schools throughout the country. Nor do they despair, and why should they, remembering they have hitherto been so marvellously blessed of God? Methinks it is but as yesterday since I saw the first sovereign put into the hands of the venerable founder of this scheme; and now we have a capital invested in Government stock of £10,000 sterling, the greater part of which, however, remains in stock by the condition on which it was obtained, as a fixed capital, available only in its annual produce, besides our ordinary income from collections and subscriptions throughout the bounds of our Church. No, my Lord [the Marquis of Bute was in the chair], we despaired not in the commencement of our great undertaking in the day of small things—and far be it from us to despair now, when the sapling of the Lord's own planting, and watered by the dew of heaven, has grown up as a cedar on our Lebanon, and that thousands of the rising generation find shelter and instruction under its wide - spreading

branches. Yes, methinks it is but as yesterday since my friend, now beside me on the platform, and I beheld the first schoolhouse which was erected for our scheme—a white speck on the dark face of the bleak mountain of Dalenlongart, and a few children amusing themselves on the little green in front of it; and now we have lived to see 146 schools, besides our noble Normal Institutions, and 1400 pupils in regular attendance! The effect which these schools have had on the character of the Highlanders and on their comforts is most encouraging. In the course of the last five years 715 young men educated at these schools have left their native land to engage in employments not open to them at home, and for which they could not have been competent but for the information received at our schools. Thus have those fine young fellows, who would otherwise have sunk down into a state of poverty and inactivity, been enabled to raise themselves in the world, and to attain to comparative comfort in society. Scope has thus been allowed for a fuller development of their own native energies and characteristic virtues, such as they never otherwise could have enjoyed. These schools have sent forth land surveyors, overseers, civil engineers, road contractors, shipmasters, and clerks in banks and counting-houses, while 180 persons taught in these schools are at this moment themselves employed as schoolmasters in their native land.” Subsequently the number of scholars attending the Committee’s schools rose to 23,000.

After the Disruption the Free Church took up the cause of education with great vigour, and founded schemes similar to those already existing in connection with the Established Church; and these flourished for many years to the great benefit of many a Highland youth.

The Education Act of 1872 put an end to the old parochial system, and virtually to the other agencies which it found at work, and now, even Raining's School at Inverness, which has since its foundation in 1757 by Mr John Raining of Norwich for the special benefit of the Highlands, sent innumerable young men to the Universities and the professions, has been closed.

THE OLD SCHOOLS.

I shall now endeavour to show what kind of establishments the old Highland schools were, what manner of men laboured in them, and under what conditions they fulfilled their duty to the pupils placed under their charge.

The Privy Council's Act of 1616, and again the Act of Parliament of 1646, provided that a school should be planted in every parish. These Acts made no provision, however, as to design or accommodation, and even the Act of 1696, which finally established the Parochial System, gave no direction other than that the school-house should be "commodious." It was thus left to the heritors of each parish to determine what kind of building was necessary, and as they were themselves bound to defray the cost, it is not, looking to their circumstances, too much to assume that they were not very ambitious in their designs, or too extravagant in

their estimates. As a matter of fact, the old country school—and this applies not only to the parochial schools but also to the “charity schools” supported by the Society—was as poor and comfortless as it well could be. Its walls were of turf, or of dry, undressed mason work, through the crevices of which the wind whistled and the drifting snow found its way; its windows were irregular holes which despised the luxury of glass; its floor was the cold, damp earth, rough and uneven as nature had left it; while its roof consisted of the usual three “black house” couples with roof-tree and cabers—all covered with “divots” or brackens which strove ineffectually to shelter teacher and pupil from the rain of heaven. How vain the endeavour often was is shown by venerable books which we still find ornamented with large stars and stains, the result of mighty drops from the roof—drops which the divots retarded in their career to earth, but which they had at the same time greatly increased in size and sooty consistency. There was no chimney or fire-place proper; but on the floor blazed a pile of peats and wood, brought by the children from their homes; while the smoke, after voyaging round and round the chamber, and adding to the polished blackness of the cabers, made its exit through the “arlas” or smoke-hole in the roof, or through the holes in the walls which were flattered with the name of windows.

The custom of “transporting” or removing the school from corner to corner of the parish did not tend to the improvement of the building. The early Society schools—with the

exception of Raining's School in Inverness, which was erected in 1757 at a cost of over £500—were from time to time transported from place to place with the view of fairly distributing their benefits over the wide districts which they were intended to serve; and the teacher had thus frequently to take up, not only his bed, but also the timber of his house and school-house, and to remove to whatever corner of his educational vineyard most needed his services. In such circumstances improvement came slowly; in some cases it came not at all. In 1865 the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the state of education in Scotland—the secretary of which was the good and learned Highlander, Alexander Nicolson, who wrote the Report—found a school in Argyllshire which is thus described:—"The state of the schoolhouse is still deplorable, a small building on the side of a hill, little attempt to level the floor, a fire in the centre of the room, and a hole in the roof for the smoke to escape; the roof seems falling to pieces, and the windows are broken." At the same time the Parliamentary school at Killiemore, in Mull, is described as "uninhabitable; earthen floor, full of hills and valleys; two windows without sashes, woodwork having rotted away; general aspect of dilapidation." The parish school of the same district is not much better:—"Old building; low roof (eight feet); earthen floor; damp and mouldy appearance; three dilapidated windows on one side." These houses, too, were devoid of proper furniture—a deal table or desk, a rick-

ety chair for the teacher, and a few rough forms, or boards resting on turf or stones, for the children, making up as a rule the educational equipment of the establishment.

THE TEACHERS' HOUSES.

The schoolmasters' dwelling-houses were scarcely superior to the school-houses. Before 1803 parochial teachers were not legally entitled to any domestic accommodation, and if dwelling-houses were provided for them they were of the poorest description—black huts, as a rule, which refused to keep out the elements. In that year Parliament enacted that each parish schoolmaster should be provided with a residence, which residence, however, was to consist of “not more than two apartments including the kitchen.” This statutory limitation was faithfully respected. Care was taken that the number of apartments did not exceed two, including the kitchen; and as these were not always of the largest dimensions possible, the schoolmaster's skill in mensuration was sometimes sorely put to the test to find room within the four lines of his but-and-ben for himself and his wife and his customary large family, with, perhaps, a maid-of-all-work thrown in.

The Act of 1861 increased the necessary accommodation to three apartments besides the kitchen; but that provision was not everywhere carried into effect. In 1865 the Education Commissioners found the old but-and-ben still in use in some places—some of them unfit for dogs. Of one dwelling-house it is recorded:—“The

roof does not protect it from the rain, and in wet weather the water has to be baled out of the inside of the house; a drain runs past the back of it, and, being on a higher level than the floor, the water comes inside in large quantities." There were others as bad; but after the passing of the Act of 1872 these wretched buildings were swept away; commodious and ornate schools and dwellings took their place; and now teachers and pupils all over the land enjoy a degree of comfort and convenience of which their less fortunate forerunners in the olden times did not dream.

THE SCHOOLMASTER.

A few words now regarding the old schoolmaster himself. The gentleman who presided over the parochial school was invariably college bred. He was frequently a student in arts or in divinity, who looked forward to the pulpit as the goal of his ambition. Sometimes he was a "stickit minister," whose heart hope deferred had long since made sick. That he was a man of education and culture the records of his time amply prove. The "trials" which he underwent at the hands of the Presbytery before he was licensed to wield the ferula were such as might stagger even good men of our own day of superior training. In theology, philosophy, and general literature he had to show himself fairly proficient; while with Latin he was expected to be as familiar as with his mother-tongue. I have found various references to the examination of schoolmasters in Presbytery records. In 1673, for example, Alexander Rose,

candidate for the Public School of Inverness, was examined in the third book of Horace, delivered a Latin oration de vanitate humanæ scientiæ—concerning the vanity of human knowledge—and passed through “all other tryalls usuall in the like case.” In February, 1674, George Dunbar, who aspired to the mastership of the school of Dingwall, was appointed by the Presbytery to appear at their next meeting, and “to be readie to have ane oratione, and to give ane exegesis of these words of Boethius in his booke ‘De Consolatione Philosophiæ’ :—

“Tu triplicis mediam natura cuncta
moventem

Connectens animam, per consona membra
resolvis.”

He accordingly came before the reverend court when it next met, and it is recorded that he “made ane oratione in Latine, with an exegesis on the poesie formerlie mentioned, in both of which he did acquit himself to the full satisfactione of the hearers.”

TEACHER AND PRECENTOR.

The standard by which the accomplishments of the teachers employed by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge were measured was not so high—although even among them men were found who, like Alexander Macdonald, the Gaelic bard, to whom I have already referred, and whom Prince Charles appointed his poet-laureate, were good classical scholars.

Candidates for the Society's schools were required to go to Edinburgh, where, after producing "attestation of their moral and religious character," they were examined by two of the ecclesiastical directors of the Society "not merely upon reading and spelling English, writing, arithmetic, and church music, but also, and most particularly, upon their acquaintance with the evangelical system, and their fitness for communicating the knowledge of it to others." The Society man, it must be remembered, was more than an instructor in the three R's. The scheme of 1710 bound him to be particularly careful to instruct his scholars in the principles of the Christian reformed religion, and for that end to catechise them at least twice a week, and to pray publicly with them twice a day. He was "ex officio the catechist of the district where he was stationed, and instructed to employ the time he could spare from the school on week days, and particularly the time of the vacation, in this exercise; and on Lord's Days, in districts where, on account of distance or other impediments, the people have not access to church, to meet with them for the purpose of religious worship and instruction." He was also, as a rule, precentor and teacher of psalmody. In teaching the old "Gaelic" tunes which were popular in his time he avoided what was considered a too free and irreverent use of the Psalms of David, and sang the tunes to rhymes of his own making. In Glen-Urquhart, the following were favourite lines at Gaelic evening singing classes:—

Buntata pronn is bainne leo
 An comhnaidh dha mo bhroinn;
 Nam faighinnsa na dh' ithinn diu
 Gum bithinn sona chaoidh!

Words which I have ventured to render into the vulgar English thus:—

With mashed potatoes and good milk
 May I be filled for aye.
 With them me feed; then shall I joy
 Until my dying day!

The lines to which the “English” tunes were sung were perhaps not so earthy. The following were common:—

One year begins, another ends,
 Our time doth pass and go;
 All this to our instruction tends,
 If we would take it so.

Another:—

The flower doth fair in garden grow;
 The heather on the hill;
 The river doth to ocean flow;
 Then bide my end I will.

While grand old “French” had a directory verse all to itself:—

Come let us sing the tune of French;
 The second measure low,
 The third ascending very high,
 The fourth doth downward go.

TREATMENT OF GAELIC.

For many years the progress of education in the Highlands was greatly impeded by the ab-

surd manner in which the language of the people was treated. The excellent Lowlanders who directed the affairs of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge in its early days, dreaded Gaelic as they dreaded the Pope, with whom they associated it; and the same regulation that bound their schoolmasters to subscribe the "Formula against Popery" bound them also to "discharge [that is, prohibit] their scholars to speak Earsè [Irish or Gaelic]." The result was that, while the great majority of the children, who knew no language but Gaelic, learned mechanically to read the Proverbs, Confession of Faith, Shorter Catechism, Vincent's Catechism, Protestant Resolutions, Pool's Dialogue, and Guthrie's Trials, which were their not too entertaining school-books, they utterly failed to understand what they read; and that when they left school they left their books and their "learning" behind them. The directors of the Society at last realised the error of their ways; and in 1767 they printed a Gaelic translation of the New Testament, which was used in their schools. Translations of other works followed, and in 1781 the directors were able to report "that their translations have been of great utility, not only in opening the minds of the people to knowledge, but in giving a greater desire to learn the English language than they had ever before discovered." After this the teachers worked on a more rational system, and the ancient tongue was treated with some degree of respect. In the schools of the Gaelic School Society, which was founded in 1811, Gaelic

spelling-books were used, and in 1817 similar books were issued to their schoolmasters by the older Society. The bad old system, however, long survived in some districts. Mr Daniel Kerr, for example, who presided over the Parish School of Glen-Urquhart during the closing years of the eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth, was an ardent believer in its merit. He made it his first duty after the opening prayer to hand to one of the boys a roughly carved piece of wood which was called "the tessera." The boy transferred it to the first pupil who was heard speaking Gaelic. That offender got rid of it by delivering it to the next, who in his turn placed it in the hand of the next again. And so the tessera went round without ceasing. At the close of the day it was called for by Mr Kerr. The child who happened to possess it was severely flogged, and then told to hand it back to the one from whom he had received it. The latter was dealt with in the same manner; and so the dreaded tessera retraced its course, with dire consequences to all who had ventured to express themselves in the only language they knew. When the master wore his red night-cap in school, as he often did, it was observed that he was more merciless than at other times, and the children came to look upon the awful head-gear as a thing of strange and evil influence. It was long before they discovered that the wearer's irritability on those occasions proceeded from a sore head brought on by the previous night's excessive conviviality. He never spared the rod; but it was not his only instrument of punishment.

The Fool's-Cap was the terror of the children; yet they dreaded the Fox's-Skin and the Neck-lace-of-Old-Bones even more. Sometimes Kerr covered the offender's head with an evil-smelling skin of a fox, and placed around his neck a string of bones. Thus adorned the boy had to proceed into the open and suffer the jeers of his companions and of passers-by; or he was made to stand in the centre of the schoolroom, while his fellows filed past and spat on him as they went!

SHINTY AND COCKFIGHTING.

But even in the olden time school-life was not without its bright seasons and pleasant features. The boys delighted in their sports—the shinty matches being especially exciting. More interesting still, perhaps, was the annual cock-fight. On the occasion of that great event it was the duty of every boy to bring a well-fed rooster to school. If he failed in this he was bound to pay the value of the bird to the schoolmaster. The school-room was for the time converted into a cockpit. The fights took place before the pupils and their parents—the minister, as a rule, gracing the meeting with his presence, and the schoolmaster being umpire and master of ceremonies. The victorious birds were restored to their proud owners—perhaps to fight another day. The dead birds and the “fugies,” or run-aways, became the property of the master, whose modest stipend was thus in no small measure augmented.

TEACHERS' SALARIES IN THE "GOOD OLD DAYS."

The most extreme advocate of retrenchment cannot accuse the old Highland schoolmaster of having been unduly remunerated for his multifarious duties. The Act of 1646 provided—and the provision was repeated in the Act of 1696—that the parish teacher's annual salary should not be less than 100 merks (£5 11s 1 1-3rd stg.), nor more than 200 (£11 2s 2 2-3rd stg.). In addition to this he usually received a small sum for acting as precentor and session clerk, and, in the earlier times, for filling the office of reader in the church. It was sometimes difficult to reach even the lowest limit of salary fixed by the Acts of Parliament. Thomas Fraser, a master of arts, who was schoolmaster of Kirkhill in 1677, and who was also "precentor and clerk, and read the Scriptures publicly every Lord's day, in the Irish [Gaelic], betwixt the second and third bell," received, as we have seen, annually for those combined offices the sum of £20 Scots (£1 13s 4d stg.), a chaldar of victual, equal perhaps to other £20 Scots, and "the baptisme and marriage money." The Act of 1803 raised the lowest limit to 300 merks (£16 13s 4d), and the highest to 400 (£22 4s 5 1-3d); and these limits were again raised in 1861 to £35 and £70 respectively. They stood at these latter figures when the Act of 1872 became law. In addition to their fixed salaries the parochial teachers were entitled to such fees as they could collect, these, however, being

frequently nil; and until well into the nineteenth century the Candlemas offerings annually made to them by the pupils, and the fowls killed or defeated at the yearly cock-fight on the floor of the schoolroom, were perquisites by no means to be despised.

The Society's teacher charged no fees, and for a long time his salary was a somewhat varying quantity. In 1729, when we first meet Alexander Macdonald, the bard, his salary is £16. In 1732 it is raised to £18. In 1738 it drops to £15, and next year to £14, while in 1744 it is reduced to £12. No wonder Macdonald looked for better things from Prince Charles, on whose landing he not only threw up his school but also his creed—for he ceased to be a Protestant catechist, and joined the Church of Rome. In 1775 the salary of Lachlan Maclachlan, teacher at Abriachan, and grandfather of the late Rev. Dr Maclachlan of Edinburgh, a great friend of Highland education, was only £10, while his successor at the time of the Disruption had only £16. In 1802 John Macdonald, teacher at Bunloit, Glen-Urquhart, and a noted guide in the paths of religion, passed rich on £15 a year. This was raised in 1810 to £18, at which it stood till he retired in 1841 with a pension of £12. In addition to his salary, each Society teacher possessed a free house, such as it was, and in many cases a kail-yard and sufficient land to maintain a cow.

HARD TIMES.

It is not surprising that with such emoluments the old Highland schoolmaster sometimes

found it difficult to keep the wolf from the door. Macdonald, the bard, was unable to meet the presbyterial visitors of his school in 1741, for the reason "that through the great scarcity of the year he was under immediate necessity to go from home to provide meal for his family." And long after his time we find teachers making the most piteous appeals for relief. One writes in April, 1818—during the dear time that followed the Napoleonic war—when corn was scarce and prices high:—"I humbly entreat for a little money, for I verily think if Providence does not open some unseen door of supply to me soon that both myself and the most of my family will die of famine; and I look upon it next to a miracle that we are not dead before now. My family frequently staid from church before their pale faces would be a gazing-stock. Our neighbours were and are very poor themselves, which rendered our case worse, for, if they had, we would not altogether want." And this poor man's case was not singular. Another writes:—"From August till April I did not see one peck of meal in my house. I am at this time a great sufferer;" while yet another states:—"My salary would not support me in this place three-quarters of a year in meal and water, as the meal is always kept so high with the meal merchants. . . I could not get one boll of meal at present, as I had no money, and that my salary was out in it before Whitsunday. I am now near a month without as much as a stone of meal got to my house, but living on the milk of one cow." Verily the men who thus

suffered were heroes and martyrs in the cause to which they had consecrated themselves.

I have now endeavoured to trace the progress of education in the Highlands, and to give some idea of the conditions under which the old Highland schoolmaster lived and laboured. When we consider those conditions we cannot but marvel at the success that accompanied his work. Out of those miserable schools which I have described young men went forth into the world to make themselves famous as statesmen, as soldiers, as preachers, and even as men of letters. And while we marvel, it becomes us also to be thankful that we are not as our forefathers were in the olden times. We are prone to look upon the past through fairy spectacles which conceal the evil and only show the good and beautiful. That is a pleasant exercise, and it may not be altogether hurtful; but we shall be all the better men and women if we occasionally lay aside the enchanting glasses and look at the evil and the good of the dead centuries with the naked eye of truth. Thus shall we be able the better to appreciate the blessings which we enjoy, but to which our fathers were strangers; and thus shall we grow in contentment and happiness. From the schoolmaster's point of view the world has in these latter days greatly improved; and fascinating as it may be to linger on certain pleasant features and customs which undoubtedly belonged to the past, few of the teachers of to-day would, I imagine, elect to be lifted, as it were, out of this present year of grace, and be thrown back

to pass their remaining days in that world of kindness and hospitality, but, withal, of poverty and privation, through which the old Highland schoolmaster struggled from the cradle to the grave.

A POSTSCRIPT.

On the subject of education in the old days in the Highland Capital, readers may desire to have the following extracts from works by Dr Mackay, which have been printed by the after-mentioned Book Clubs exclusively for their members, and are consequently not always easily accessible to the general public:—

I. Records of Inverness, 1556 to 1586—New Spalding Club:—

“In Roman Catholic times an ‘auld scule’ stood between the Friars Yard and ‘the Hie Kingis Gett passis to the Chapel Yard.’ The name ‘auld scule’ which appears in the Records in 1574, implies that at that time there was a new school. On 3rd February, 1557, the Council imposed a stent of 12 bolls of victual on ‘the commone takis and possessors of tham to be gyfin yerle to the Master of Sculle for his fee, and fowyr pundis mone [money] in pencion, to be payit to hym yerle at twa termis, for techyn of the scull.’ He also received a ‘days met’ (day’s meat) from each of certain tack holders, or, in lieu thereof in time of dearth, 2s per day. Mr Thomas Hewison was schoolmaster in 1562, and continued in office after he became minister of the parish. His salary was 50 merks, and, in lieu of the day’s meat, each tack holder

paid him 11s 1d yearly; and he also received £5 out of the common good 'as it wont to be,' together with the stallanger silver collected from unfree brewsters, and other allowances. In 1564, Martyne Logye was master of the school, and he added to his income by trading as a stallanger, and practising as a procurator before the Burgh Court. Probably he acted under Hewison, who appears as 'Maistyr of the Grammar Scule of Innernis' in February, 1566, and obliges himself to find 'ane sufficient doctour for teaching vnder him of the said scule.' Patrick Anderson, chaplain to St Michael, is appointed 'doctour vnder the said Maistyr' for his lifetime, at a salary of 10 merks. In 1570, Andrew Macphail, who was Gaelic minister of Inverness, and minister of Petty, was appointed 'doctor' under Hewison at the same salary.

"That the education given was fairly 'sufficient' is evidenced by the fact that although writing had not yet become a common accomplishment in England and Scotland generally, many of the persons who appear in these Records in connection with written transactions are able to write. In October, 1557, George Cuthbert and Jasper Dempster subscribe with their own hands. Of fifteen persons who subscribe a document in 1560, eleven write their own signatures, the hands of the remaining four being 'led.' In 1580, a paper is signed by twenty-two individuals with their own hands, and by nineteen by their hands led by the town clerk as notary public; and in 1584, ten persons, including six watermen, or fishers at the cruives, are all able to write. Before

1574, the 'auld scule' ceased to exist, having been superseded by a new school; and its larach or site was let to William Cuthbert, the provost, at an annual rent of 5s, payable to the Town.

INVERNESS ENGLISH.

"One result of the educational work done in the 'auld scule' and its successors was that Inverness became noted for the excellence of its English. This excellence was ascribed by Dr Samuel Johnson to the sojourn of an English regiment in the Town during the period of the Commonwealth. 'The soldiers,' he writes in his "Journey to the Western Islands," 'seem to have incorporated afterwards with the inhabitants, and to have peopled the place with an English race; for the language of this town has been long considered as peculiarly elegant.' But, as the writer of this introduction has remarked elsewhere, there is no reason to suppose that the soldiers had themselves that elegance of speech which they are said to have imparted. The rank and file were unlearned men, drawn from all parts of England, and probably speaking as many dialects as are still found between Northumberland and Devon. The elegance of the Inverness English in the old days has been remarked upon by other travellers; and its origin is to be found in the circumstance that the language was acquired by a mainly Gaelic-speaking people (whose tongue was remarkably free from 'brogue' or 'accent') not from English soldiers, but from educated schoolmasters and good English books."

OTHER EXTRACTS.

II. From the Introduction to the Wardlaw Manuscript (Scottish History Society) in reference to Master James Fraser, who was born on 1st January, 1634, and was minister of the Parish of Wardlaw (now Kirkhill) from 1661 to 1709. Master James travelled much on the Continent, and was one of the most voluminous writers of his day, among his unpublished works (now lost) being a Gaelic dictionary and a volume of Gaelic verse:—

“Fraser received his early education at the Grammar School of Inverness. Along with his chief’s son, James Fraser, he boarded with his schoolmaster, John Robertson—‘a pope’ with whom ‘we must content ourselves to remain sub ferula.’ He was with Robertson as late as 1650, and probably until 1651, when he entered King’s College, Aberdeen, where, in 1655, he took his degree of master of arts.

“A student of diligence and gifts, Mr James, as he was now by virtue of his degree entitled to be called, ripened into a scholar of culture and erudition. In addition to English and Gaelic, he wrote Latin and French with ease; and he had some knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, German, and Italian.”

III. From the Introduction to the Letter-Book of Bailie John Steuart of Inverness, 1715-1752 (Scottish History Society):—

“Steuart’s family was a large one. The Letter-Book evidences his care to have his children well educated. Among the subjects which

his boys were taught at the Inverness Grammar School were Latin and Greek. The girls were educated at the same institution, and, as regards certain subjects, at other schools. 'Wee have,' he writes in 1732, 'verie good schools of all kinds here, and vast many young girles sent here to be educat.' His daughter Ann married Richard Hay-Newton of Newton, East Lothian, and it is to her descendant, Mr W. Hay-Newton, the present proprietor of Newton, that the writer is indebted for the Letter-Book. Another daughter married Captain Reid, and another Captain Wedderburn. His son Alexander was a wine merchant in Leith. James went to India, where he prospered. John, after spending some years at sea, and going round the world with Lord Anson as purser of the 'Centurion,' settled in Charleston, South Carolina, where he was appointed British agent for the Carolinas. He is said to have been the only officer who escaped in the massacre at Fort Loudoun on the Tennessee River in 1760. In the American War of Independence he took the British side, and on the conclusion of the war left America for good and settled in England, bringing home with him the child whom the Bailie blessed in his last recorded letter, and who was destined to become famous as Sir John Stuart, Count Maida—the victor of Maida, where, to the surprise of the world, 'the veterans of Napoleon fled before the British steel.'

"The Bailie's sons, Francis, Patrick, and Henry, also settled in South Carolina. Many Highlanders emigrated to the same State in the early years of the eighteenth century, and

for generations Gaelic was as much spoken there as in the parish of Inverness—negroes speaking it, to the amazement and horror of later Highland emigrants. The Gaelic is now dead in the State, but in Charleston the ‘Old Stuart House,’ built by John and Francis, still stands.

“A pleasing trait in the Bailie’s character may be mentioned. He was fond of flowers, and was in the habit of placing southernwood and other sweet-smelling plants and herbs between the leaves of his letter-book, which consists of a number of volumes. These lay there undisturbed until the volumes were read by the Editor (Dr Mackay) after the lapse of nigh two centuries.”

